



Pascal Pugin—Outline

Rebels in the Afghan hills: Arms and ammunition courtesy of the CIA?

The Afghan Connection

Eugene Ray Clegg, 35, an American schoolteacher in Islamabad, was sentenced last February to 10 years of hard labor by a Pakistani military court. The charge: smuggling arms. The government story was that Clegg had imported a consignment of rifles for use in his science classes. Islamabad's diplomatic community assumed that Clegg had been selling arms to the Afghan mujahedin (guerrillas) for their war of resistance against the Soviet Union. At first, most thought his methods too clumsy to have any CIA connection. But they began to wonder when, less than a week after his sentencing, Clegg was very efficiently sprung from jail and spirited out of Pakistan.

The official U.S. position on the war in Afghanistan is that it is an indigenous insurgency with no direct U.S. involvement. The official position of the Afghan rebels is that they arm themselves with weapons captured from the Afghan Army. But the truth is far more complex: a CIA covert operation is bankrolling, training and supplying intelligence for the rebel forces. The slippery clues to how the operation works are the stuff of spy fiction.

Bills: The CIA's Afghan operation has to be extraordinarily discreet: neither the United States nor Pakistan wants to give the Soviet Union any excuse to step up activities in the area, and the rebels don't want to be tarnished by U.S. ties. The agency's role is largely limited to arranging shipments of matériel and paying the bills. Washington sources estimate that the United States now supplies the mujahedin with \$100 million annually—mostly through middlemen who can supply Russian- or Chinese-made

weapons to cloak the U.S. involvement.

Recently, a Pakistani businessman who had long lived in the United States started building a tire factory in Peshawar. But Pakistani police discovered that some of the crates of "equipment" delivered to the factory contained arms. The businessman was arrested, released and has faded from view. Many Pakistani industrialists do not think he would have embarked on such a major investment as a free-lance arms merchant: the CIA, they point out, was probably a silent partner.

In the early days of the war, most of the arms for the mujahedin came to Pakistan from Egypt. Today, China seems to be a primary supplier, and many observers suspect that the smugglers operate with cover from the Pakistani Defense Ministry. According to one knowledgeable Pakistani source, for example, Russian-made arms captured by Israel from Syria and the PLO were sold to a Canadian

middleman, then shipped through a U.S. middleman to "somewhere in the [Persian] Gulf"—possibly Saudi Arabia—and finally on to Pakistan to be passed across the Afghan border.

'Big Mouth': Although there are doubtless many private arms deals that do not involve the CIA at all, the sheer complexity of such an arrangement suggests the agency's presence in the background. "It's almost inconceivable," says a Pakistani, "that such a complicated connection occurred on its own." But whatever the United States is doing for the rebels, many of their leaders feel it is not enough. Abdülhaq, the guerrilla leader who commands 4,500 fighters around the Afghan capital of Kabul, says the mujahedin badly need U.S. surface-to-air missiles (their few Soviet- or Chinese-made SAM's have proved ineffective), but laments, "The U.S. has a big mouth but doesn't do much."

Still, there are clear signs that the stepped-up CIA involvement is having its effect. Early this year the Soviet Union increased bombing runs against the Afghan rebels, and the KGB backed up the military activity by courting informers with big rewards. Some mujahedin leaders feared their freedom fight in Afghanistan might be short lived. It didn't turn out that way.

Suddenly, the rebel forces seem stronger than ever. Food in the rebel camps is better, some of the mujahedin are sporting canvas boots and they are stocked with ample small arms, mortars and 12.7-mm machine guns. "There was a time when the military commanders would gratefully accept almost any type of small arms," says Bahajudin Majrooh, who runs the Afghan Information Center in Peshawar near the border. "Now they are much more selective and know precisely where they are short."

MARK STARR with EDWARD BEHR in Peshawar